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IT'S A LONG WAY TO UTOPIA

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The victorious Elijah marched the whole battalion of the prophets of Baal down to the brook Kishon "and slew them there." For an hour we behold him exultant in victory. The religion of Jehovah had been restored to its purity; the people had been saved; it was all over but the shouting. But from this dream of complete and final triumph he was awakened to reality by the intervention of a strongwilled queen, and at her sinister threat he fled in despair. So fades the dream of every man who tries to take a short cut to Utopia.

Consider that benefactor of the race, Mr. Everett True, whose reforming activities are pictorially narrated from day to day in the comic section of the *Chicago Evening Post*. There is something refreshing about the summary manner in which the portly Mr. True disposes of the pessimist, the unchivalrous, the ill-mannered, the impostor, the waster of other people's time, and every sort of human nuisance. Nothing in the range of cartoon satire could be more praiseworthy. The comic hero walks among his victims with a becoming air of inerrancy and omnipotence. Despicable in their selfishness, they fully deserve their fate. Right, armed with might, deals out poetic justice—cartoon justice—to the unsocial offenders against cultured and humanized society.

But the prosaic mind cannot long indulge the picture of this noble sport

without misgivings and regrets. After all Mr. True as a reformer has his limitations. You cannot translate him into the actual world. Just men are not all muscular. And police courts rarely sanction the private infliction of punishment, however merited. It is not wise to take the enemies of human happiness by the collar and hurl them from speeding trains to oblivion, or send them sprawling in humiliation down stone steps. The farther we progress on the road to democracy the more difficult it becomes to bring reform summarily. Prohibition will never again come overnight in a *ukase*. In real life as we know it, the mills of the gods grind slowly.

There remains, however, in some men, a noble impatience that induces them to believe in and attempt short cuts to Utopia. Fascinated by their dream they ignore those realities which do not accord with the dream. The illusive prospect of a national paradise of social and political calm prompts a government to deport real or suspected agitators. This is too short a way to the desired goal, and it will be found not to lead thither. Either it will rob the nation of the services of those useful cranks whose function is to stimulate a people to think, or it will react in a really dangerous increase of irresponsible radicalism.

Socialism is the most popular of modern prescriptions for happiness. No doubt its prophets have taught some

valuable lessons that will help to emancipate and to consolidate mankind. But put to the test of responsibility it seems to give evidence of serious defects and omissions. It shows no appreciation of those fundamental human factors, learning in its cultural aspect, emotion, and religion. Unless it can ally itself with these things that have the momentum of the centuries with them, it will deceive its believers and disappoint its friends.

The church has tried many a short cut to Utopia. Such was, for instance, monasticism. It omitted too much of normal life from its scheme of a saved society. With its vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience, it repudiated the home, the market, and the right of free choice which issues in politics. Its truncated morality had nothing to do with domestic, economic and political concerns. It sought its Utopia in a narrow fellowship, while the world of men to whom these things were still essential was left in moral and temporal misery. But the world was too strong for the group, and persistently wore down its idealism. Human nature asserted itself, and the monasteries repeatedly opened their doors to these common interests of man. For monasticism this meant corruption and decay, the failure of its impossible Utopia.

The Puritan theocracy is open to a similar criticism. With all its imposing grandeur, it left out too much to be other than impermanent. It left out art; it left out laughter—essential elements of a healthy society. And it has become no more than an inspiring ruin.

The founders of church orders, denominations, and sects, and likewise the leaders of political reform, have too

often, like Elijah, regarded themselves as the agents of an ultimate divine solution of the human problem. Their little systems had their day, and the problem took new forms. The time is come for more far-sighted leadership. The wise leader will no longer promise sudden millennium dawns. He may approve woman suffrage and prohibition, but he will not expect either of these to provide for nations a new morality. He may labor for Christian co-operation, but he will not picture the Devil in flight to hide his diminished head on discovering an interdenominational conference.

His will be that higher devotion which sees no near deliverance and demands none, but is content to toil in faith toward a distant and ever-receding Utopia. He will not think merely in terms of the heartening or disheartening contemporary facts and statistics, nor confine his interest in humanity to the past five and the next five years. He will live in man's far past, in the great Christian centuries, and through imagination and hope, in the greater eras yet to be.

Elijah, in the profound story, learned that it is not in the spectacular and dramatic events, nor by destructive forces, that the Kingdom comes, but in ways that are gentle and unobtrusive. He felt himself commanded to go back to the dull routine of civilization, to the slow-moving world which in the sequence of the generations needed a new series of kings and prophets. He had had his hour of success and failure; now it was his remaining duty to help provide for that commonplace succession. The theocracy was not to be achieved, he

now saw, by a miracle or by a massacre; it was to be approached by a process extending through uncounted generations. Its progress was to be aided by every man's contribution, and this required patience, faith, humility, and largeness of view.

Many still need this fundamental lesson. They fancy that brilliant programs will furnish a panacea for difficulty. Probably many of the schemes of advance advocated in the church today are viewed in that light by the more indolent among us. But these schemes, if successful, can only lead to further tasks of greater difficulty. Mag-

nificent organization will never obviate the need of patient hard work. Organization is best regarded as an aid to the more prolonged and difficult work of education. The way to Utopia is a long way. The dim towers of that desired city seem to recede as we advance. Neither we nor our children will enter its gates. It is "the ever-coming Kingdom of God." But if, realizing all this, we are still brave and faithful enough to seek it steadily, we shall be true guides. And we shall avoid alike the foolishness of short-visioned optimism and the peril of disillusionment and despair.